

ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: A SURVEY OF ICONIC PIANO
COMPOSITIONS BY IMPORTANT
COMPOSERS OF THE ROMANTIC ERA

Shuai Wang, Doctor of Musical Arts, 2021

Dissertation directed by: Professor Larissa Dedova
School of Music

The Romantic Era is often referred to as a time full of strong energy and passion; music became more expressive, programmatic, and associated with literature, visual arts, and philosophy. Since the piano occupied a very important position in this period, piano music became one of the most prominent genres of that time. Some of the leading composers include Franz Schubert, Robert Schumann, Frédéric Chopin, Johannes Brahms, Franz Liszt, and Sergei Rachmaninoff, all of whom composed and published a huge number and variety of works for piano. The German romantic composer, Schumann produced piano works which were closely related to the literature of that period, and his personal struggles were reflected in his unique piano works. Schumann enjoyed writing large sets of character pieces, which were usually associated with descriptive titles and texts. Chopin, unlike Schumann, would simply designate those types of works as nocturnes, scherzos, preludes, and then gathered them into collections. The Hungarian composer Liszt created a large

number of piano works including many character pieces and piano transcriptions.

Liszt was not the only one who loved to transcribe other composers' works. Both the Italian composer Busoni and the Russian composer Rachmaninoff also made many transcriptions, such as the Chaconne in D minor BWV 1004 by J. S. Bach's, *Liebesleid and Liebesfreud* by Fritz Kreisler, all of which are transcribed from works for violin. Many of these works quickly achieved and maintained iconic status within the huge Romantic piano repertoire.

This dissertation project consisted of three recitals by performing with performances of selected works by Robert Schumann, Frédéric Chopin, Franz Liszt, Ferruccio Busoni and Sergei Rachmaninoff. The recitals were presented at the Gildenhorn Recital Hall in the Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center of the University of Maryland. Live compact disc recordings of the three recitals can be found in the Digital Repository at the University of Maryland (DRUM).

A SURVEY OF ICONIC PIANO COMPOSITIONS BY IMPORTANT
COMPOSERS OF THE ROMANTIC ERA

by

Shuai Wang

Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the
University of Maryland, College Park, in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
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FIRST DISSERTATION RECITAL PROGRAM

December 07, 2018. 8:00 PM
Gildenhorn Recital Hall, Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center
College Park, University of Maryland

Shuai Wang, piano

Robert Schumann (1810 - 1856)

Davidsbündlertänze, Op. 6

1. Lebhaft
2. Innig
3. Etwas hahnbüchen
4. Ungeduldig
5. Einfach
6. Sehr rasch
7. Nicht schnell
8. Frisch
9. Lebhaft
10. Balladenmäßig sehr rasch
11. Einfach
12. Mit Humor
13. Wild und lustig
14. Zart und singend
15. Frisch
16. Mit gutem Humor
17. Wie aus der Ferne
18. Nicht schnell

Intermission

Frédéric Chopin (1810 – 1849)

Scherzo No. 3 in C-Sharp Minor, Op. 39

J. S. Bach – Ferruccio Busoni (1866 – 1924)

Chaconne in D Minor, BWV 1004

RECORDING TRACK LISTING

Dissertation Recital #1 – CD 1

Robert Schumann (1810 - 1856)

Davidsbündlertänze, Op. 6

[TRACK 1, CD 1] 1. Lebhaft	1'10"
[TRACK 2, CD 1] 2. Innig	1'26"
[TRACK 3, CD 1] 3. Etwas hahnbüchen	1'35"
[TRACK 4, CD 1] 4. Ungeduldig	0'45"
[TRACK 5, CD 1] 5. Einfach	2'12"
[TRACK 6, CD 1] 6. Sehr rasch	1'42"
[TRACK 7, CD 1] 7. Nicht schnell	3'14"
[TRACK 8, CD 1] 8. Frisch	0'48"
[TRACK 9, CD 1] 9. Lebhaft	0'59"
[TRACK 10, CD 1] 10. Balladenmäßig sehr rasch	1'43"
[TRACK 11, CD 1] 11. Einfach	2'01"
[TRACK 12, CD 1] 12. Mit Humor	0'44"
[TRACK 13, CD 1] 13. Wild und lustig	1'59"
[TRACK 14, CD 1] 14. Zart und singend	1'58"
[TRACK 15, CD 1] 15. Frisch	2'07"
[TRACK 16, CD 1] 16. Mit gutem Humor	1'23"
[TRACK 17, CD 1] 17. Wie aus der Ferne	4'08"
[TRACK 18, CD 1] 18. Nicht schnell	2'20"

Frédéric Chopin (1810 – 1849)

Scherzo No. 3 in C-Sharp Minor, Op. 39

[TRACK 19, CD 1]	7'58"
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J. S. Bach – Ferruccio Busoni (1866 – 1924)

Chaconne in D Minor, BWV 1004

[TRACK 20, CD 1]	15'38"
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PROGRAM NOTES

“Music Romanticism may be characterized as an art which emphasizes the subjective and the emotional possibilities of music and neglects the formal and structural point of view.”¹ The Romantic period is considered to be an era full of strong energy and passion; during this time, music became more expressive and programmatic, and was associated with literature, visual arts, and philosophy. Many composers began to explore ways to express personal character and emotions through music. The piano itself, and piano compositions were already in demand in this period, and advances in piano technology further increased the instrument’s popularity. Improvements in the soundboard, strings, and the cast iron frame made it more capable of those magnificent Romantic piano works that captured and conveyed the complex nuances of human emotions. Prominent composers, including Franz Schubert, Robert Schumann, Johannes Brahms, Frédéric Chopin, Franz Liszt, Ferruccio Busoni, and Sergei Rachmaninoff, composed and published a vast number of works for solo piano and chamber music. Popular genres include character pieces, études, sonatas, piano transcriptions, and concerti.

Robert Schumann (1810 - 1856)
Dauidsbündlertänze, Op. 6

The piano played a significant role in the Romantic era, and character pieces became a major compositional genre of the time. Schumann wrote approximately 250

¹ Willi Apel, *Harvard Dictionary of Music* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1944), 650.

character pieces, Chopin wrote nearly 200, and Schubert composed around 300. The character piece is “normally a one-movement quasi-programmatic work, often gathered in cycles or collections and including such types as nocturnes, preludes, impromptus, and ballades.”²

One of the greatest composers of the Romantic era, Robert Schumann was known for his highly imaginative and creative piano works. His music was influenced by the literature of that period, and his personal struggles were reflected in his works in a unique way. The creation of the two characters, dreamy Eusebius and passionate Florestan, representing the two sides of Schumann’s personality, can be seen in many of his piano works. Schumann enjoyed writing large sets of character pieces that were usually associated with descriptive titles, texts, and narrations. His distinctive compositional style was characterized by rapid shifts of mood, “fast harmonic rhythm, unusual pedal effects, syncopation and cross-rhythms, varied accompanimental figurations, chord doublings.”³

Composed in 1837, *Davidsbündlertänze*, Op. 6 is one of the most mature large-scale works in Schumann’s early creations. Described as the work of Eusebius and Florestan, this cycle of two sets of nine character pieces features the aforementioned as the main narrators of this work. At the end of each dance, one finds an ‘F.’, or ‘E.’, or ‘F.’ and ‘E.’ to specify the particular character supposedly responsible for that dance. Dances signed with ‘E.’ are gentle and lyrical, representing Eusebius’s quiet, introverted, and imaginative character. These are

² David Poultney, *Studying Music History: Learning, Reasoning, and Writing About Music History and Literature*, 2nd ed. (Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall, 1996), 151.

³ Maurice Hinson and Wesley Roberts, *Guide to the Pianist’s Repertoire*, 4th ed. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2014), 888.

starkly contrasted with dances ending with ‘F.’ which are full of energy and passion. Schumann’s large sets of piano works usually comprise multiple small pieces, each having its own tempo, rhythm, character, and style. However, the basic elements of the melodies are often related to each other, and the central key is relatively uniform. In *Davidsbündlertänze*, Op. 6, “G major and B minor are the two main keys, and maybe considered the central key of Florestan and Eusebius respectively.”⁴

The work opens with an old proverb:

<i>Alter Spruch.</i>	<i>Old proverb</i>
<i>In all' und jeder Zeit</i>	<i>Along the way we go</i>
<i>Verknüpft sich Lust und Leid:</i>	<i>In mingled joy and woe:</i>
<i>Bleibt fromm in Lust und sey</i>	<i>In joy, though glad, be grave</i>
<i>Dem Leid mit Muth bereit</i>	<i>In woe, though sad, be brave.</i>

Schumann and Clara Wieck were secretly engaged in August 1837, and this work is closely associated with the immense happiness that Schumann was feeling. “Perhaps more than any other of Schumann’s works, this one expresses love and hope for their union.”⁵ In a letter to Clara, Schumann mentioned that this work contained many thoughts of their impending marriage.

In the first dance, the opening musical motif is quoted from the Mazurka of Clara’s *Soirees musicales*, Op. 6. Actually, *Davidsbündlertänze* was composed two years after the appearance of *Carnaval*, Op. 9. However, Schumann chose the same opus number as Clara’s Op.6, perhaps hoping to show how much he cherished their relationship.

⁴ Robert Schumann, *Davidsbündlertänze*, Op. 6, 1st ed. (Germany: Wiener Urtext, 1997), 9.

⁵ Beate Perry, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Schumann* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 86.

Figure 1: Clara Schumann, *Soirees musicales*, Op. 6, No.5, Measures 1 – 4.



Figure 2: Robert Schumann, *Davidsbündlertänze*, Op. 6, No. 1, Measures 1 – 5.



The ‘C. W.’ motto in the second figure is also significant to the work both musically and thematically. “The leap of a sixth and the suspensions in this motto provide substance for motifs throughout the whole cycle.”⁶

Another old proverb prefaces the ninth dance; this dance begins with ‘*Hierauf schloß Florestan und es zuckte ihm schmerzlich um die Lippen*’ (Here Florestan kept silence, but his lips were quivering with emotions). At this point, Schumann utilized the dotted rhythm to imitate the quivering.

Figure 3: Robert Schumann, *Davidsbündlertänze*, Op. 6, No. 9, Measures 1 – 5.



⁶ Schumann, *Davidsbündlertänze*, 9.

The concluding dance is preceded by yet another old proverb – ‘*Ganz zum Überfluss meinte Eusebius noch Folgendes; dabei sprach aberviel Seligkeit aus seinen Augen* (Quite redundantly Eusebius added the following; but great happiness shone in his eyes all the while). Instead of ending the set with an intense or enthusiastic dance, Schumann turned to a sweet and memory-filled dance. C major was crucial for Schumann as he often used it to signify Clara. His *Fantasie* Op. 17, described as a love letter in music, was written in C major. In *Davidsbündlertänze*, both sets end in C major, Schumann’s way of professing his boundless and endless love for Clara. Besides, the purpose of using C major for these two dances of number 9 and 18 may also be his way “to celebrate Clara’s 18th birthday on 13 September 1837.”⁷

Frédéric Chopin (1810 – 1849)
 Scherzo No. 3 in C-Sharp Minor, Op. 39

Unlike Schumann’s large sets of character pieces replete with literary programs or titles, Chopin preferred to group individual character pieces into collections, i.e., the 4 Scherzos, 21 Nocturnes, and 59 Mazurkas. His works, the vast majority of which were for piano solo, focus on poetry and delicate emotions, and features of his writing style include but are not limited to “chromaticism, the frequent use of dissonance, and harmonic progressions of unusual direction.”⁸ In addition to J. S. Bach and W. A. Mozart, the important Italian opera composer Vincenzo Bellini also influenced Chopin a great deal; Chopin’s trademark long melodic lines,

⁷ Geoffrey Narramore Moon, “The Inner Musical Workings of Robert Schumann 1828 – 1840” (PhD thesis, Adelaide University, 2001), 1: 160.

⁸ Stewart Gordon, *A History of Keyboard Literature* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1996), 278.

reminiscent of Bellini's *bel canto* melodies, can even be found in his early compositions. According to Schumann, "Chopin is and remains the most audacious, the proudest poetical genius of the time."⁹

The Italian word *Scherzo* means a joke or refers to a witty character. The defining characteristics of scherzi are triple meter, fast tempi, and contrasting characters between sections. In the Classical era, the scherzo was usually a movement from a larger four-movement work, like a symphony, sonata, or string quartet. However, Chopin liberated it "from its role in larger sonata structure, expanded [it], and [it] became a piece associated with considerable virtuosity."¹⁰ He was the first to use the scherzo as a stand-alone concert piece.

The four Scherzos by Chopin "are in ABA design with a contrasting B midsection."¹¹ Regarded as the most dramatic of the four, Scherzo No.3 was composed in the winter of 1838-1839 and was dedicated to one of his closest pupils, Adolphe Gutmann. The work begins with three inquisitive phrases that are answered by the affirmative bell-like chords. After two more repetitions of this pattern, the piece finally reaches the main key of C-sharp minor. The main theme reaffirms the key of C-sharp minor with its relentlessly cascading octaves filled with fiery passion and robust momentum. The B section is completely opposite to the A section in character and dynamics. It ushers the audience into a dreamy world with "the most delectable music"¹² comprised of "a chorale-like melody in D-flat major with falling

⁹ John Gillespie, *Five Centuries of Keyboard Music: An Historical Survey of Music for Harpsichord and Piano* (New York: Dover Publications, 1972), 235.

¹⁰ Gordon, *Keyboard Literature*, 279.

¹¹ Hinson and Roberts, *Pianist's Repertoire*, 252.

¹² Gillespie, *Five Centuries*, 234.

sprays of *leggerissimo* arpeggios interspersed among the sostenuto chords.”¹³

Finally, the scherzo closes with a stormy and brilliant coda.

J. S. Bach – Ferruccio Busoni (1866 – 1924)
Chaconne in D Minor, BWV 1004

“The art of translating music from one medium to another.... was already flourishing in the 16th century”¹⁴ and it continued to thrive into the 19th century.

Composers including Liszt, Brahms, and Rachmaninoff often re-arranged their own works as well as those of other composers. Piano transcriptions became popular in the second half of the 19th century, when composers were enthusiastically “arranging popular works of the time in an effective fashion for performance on the piano.”¹⁵

Perhaps it was Liszt who contributed to the genre of piano transcription more than any other composer. However there was another active composer and transcriber who produced a slew of piano transcriptions that merit discussion: the Italian composer Ferruccio Busoni.

Born in Italy in 1866, Busoni showed his talent in music at a very young age. Not only well-known as a composer, Busoni was also a pianist, conductor, teacher, editor, and writer. He composed a large number of piano works, operas, chamber music, and songs. Busoni’s earlier compositions are steeped in the late romantic style, but later compositions are usually associated with elements of atonality. Although many of his works have fallen from popularity, his piano transcriptions of J. S.

¹³ Hinson and Roberts, *Pianist’s Repertoire*, 252.

¹⁴ Kathleen Dale, *Nineteenth-Century Piano Music: A Handbook for Pianists*, (New York: Da Capo Press, 1972), 168-169.

¹⁵ F. E. Kirby, *Music for Piano: A Short History* (Pompton Plains: Amadeus Press, 1995), 225.

Bach's works are still widely played today, most notably the Chaconne in D Minor, BWV 1004.

The original work, Violin Partita No.2 in D Minor, is an unaccompanied solo piece from J. S. Bach's Sonatas and Partitas for Solo Violin. Chaconne, a set of variations in triple meter, is the final movement in this five-movement partita. Although it has been arranged by many composers including Brahms and Alexander Siloti, Busoni's piano transcription is the most famous one. It is unclear when Busoni completed the transcription, but it was first published in late 1892.

The work is "a type of double transcription. Busoni first mentally imagined it as an organ piece and then transcribed it for the piano."¹⁶ He aspired to transcribe this spellbinding violin masterpiece for his own instrument and showed his great respect of the original work by following it measure by measure, making only two minor changes. In his transcription, Busoni enriched the sound of the original work by adding octaves, various dynamic shifts, and doubling the chordal notes, etc. He wanted to imitate the sonorities of the organ and/or an orchestra rather than simply play this violin work on the piano. His early publication of the transcription had specific tempo indications throughout the piece but later on, all indications are that he performed it in a relatively uniform tempo and minimized sudden tempo changes.

¹⁶ Larry Sitsky, *Busoni and the Piano: The Works, the Writings, and the Recordings* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1986), 307.

SECOND DISSERTATION RECITAL PROGRAM

May 12, 2019. 14:00 PM
Gildenhorn Recital Hall, Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center
College Park, University of Maryland

Shuai Wang, piano

Assisted by:
Dr. Christopher Koelzer, Piano

Sergei Rachmaninoff (1873 – 1943)

The Piano Concerto No.2 in C Minor, Op. 18

I: Moderato

II: Adagio sostenuto

III: Allegro scherzo

Dr. Christopher Koelzer, Piano Accompaniment

Intermission

Sergei Rachmaninoff (1873 – 1943)

The *Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini*, Op.43

Dr. Christopher Koelzer, Piano Accompaniment

RECORDING TRACK LISTING

Dissertation Recital #2 – CD 2

Sergei Rachmaninoff (1873 – 1943)

The Piano Concerto No.2 in C Minor, Op. 18

[TRACK 1, CD 2] I: Moderato 11'01"

[TRACK 2, CD 2] II: Adagio sostenuto 10'51"

[TRACK 3, CD 2] III: Allegro scherzo 12'00"

Sergei Rachmaninoff (1873 – 1943)

The *Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini*, Op.43

[TRACK 4, CD 2] 22'49"

PROGRAM NOTES

Sergei Rachmaninoff (1873 – 1943)
The Piano Concerto No.2 in C Minor, Op. 18

As one of the principal genres in the Classical era, piano concertos continued to flourish in the Romantic period. Well-known concertos from this time include those written by Chopin, Liszt, Schumann, Brahms, and Rachmaninoff. Perhaps his most illustrious works, Rachmaninoff's four piano concerti were written between 1891 and 1926; all the four concerti, along with the *Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini*, Op.43, remain popular today.

The Piano Concerto No. 2, composed between 1900 and 1901, was dedicated to Dr. Nikolai Dahl, a physician who helped Rachmaninoff recover from depression caused by the disastrous premiere of his first symphony. The second and third movements came out first and were performed on December 2nd, 1900, with the composer as the soloist. The complete work was premiered in 1901 with Rachmaninoff again as the soloist and his cousin Alexander Siloti conducting. It was, in contrast on the symphony, a resounding success and its popularity has never waned.

Rachmaninoff's piano compositions are influenced not only by Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky, but also by Chopin and Liszt. "He concentrated on the Chopin-Liszt framework of singing melodies and rich sonorities, decorated by elaborate technical embellishments."¹⁷ The composer's melodies are structured in two different ways. "One being long, flowing melodies with a tendency to progress by intervals of a third,

¹⁷ Gillespie, *Five Centuries*, 276.

and the other being short, tight melodies which hover continually around one note.”¹⁸

The former can be seen in the third movement of his Piano Concert No. 2, while the latter is exemplified in the opening of the first movement.

One of the most significant structural changes in the concerto form from the Classical era to the Romantic era is the elimination of an opening orchestral tutti in the first movement. The opening movement of the Piano Concerto No. 2 starts with eight bold yet solemn chords in the piano part alone which eventually establish the key of C minor on the ninth chord. The strings and first clarinet introduce the first theme while the piano accompanies the orchestra. The second lyrical theme, which is broad and poetic, is stated by the solo piano. In the development section, the motifs from the first two themes are further developed between the orchestra and piano, and eventually the triumphant climax of the first movement arrives. As in the first movement, the second movement starts with a series of slow chords in the strings and modulates from C minor to E major in the first four introductory measures. The highlight of this movement is the delicate texture and the relationship between the piano and orchestra. Another important change to the formal structure of Romantic era concerti is the “relocation [of the cadenza] from the coda to a place anywhere in the movement but usually as a transition between sections.”¹⁹ The brilliant finale opens with a short orchestral introduction before a dramatic piano solo cadenza leading to the statement of the agitated first theme. The second theme, which is presented by the oboes and violas, borrows the first movement’s cantabile second

¹⁸ John Culshaw, *Rachmaninov: The Man and His Music* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1950), 50.

¹⁹ Rey M. Longyear, *Nineteenth-century Romanticism in Music*, 3rd ed., (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1988) 139.

theme motif and provides contrast to the energetic first theme. After the dazzling closing section, the concerto ends with an exuberant flourish. The “poetry, beauty, warmth, rich orchestration, healthy and buoyant creative power”²⁰ of Rachmaninoff’s second piano concerto has established it as one of the most beloved works at the heart of the piano repertoire.

Sergei Rachmaninoff (1873 – 1943)
The *Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini*, Op.43

The *Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini*, Op.43 is scored for piano and orchestra. It was written in 1934 when Rachmaninoff was at his summer home in Switzerland. It premiered on November 7th of the same year with the composer himself as the soloist and Leopold Stokowski conducting the Philadelphia Orchestra in Baltimore. The piece is a set of variations based on Niccolò Paganini’s Violin Caprice No. 24 in A Minor, which is the final one of his 24 Caprices. This caprice is a famous work for solo violin and has inspired previous composers including Schumann, Liszt, and Brahms. The *Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini* consists of an introduction, 24 variations, and a coda, most of which are written in A minor, which is one of Rachmaninoff’s favorite keys.

After a short introduction by the orchestra, the first variation uses the first note of each measure of the Caprice’s theme. The piano then enters the next to a vivid and humorous effect. “There is more humour, more light-heartedness in this music than in any other of his works.”²¹ In contrast with Paganini’s lighthearted Caprice,

²⁰ Sergei Bertensson and Jay Leyda, *Sergei Rachmaninoff: A Lifetime in Music* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), 95.

²¹ Culshaw, *Rachmaninov*, 96.

Rachmaninoff introduces the second theme, the *Dies Irae*, in variation seven, and continues its use in some of the later variations. This is a chant from the Catholic mass for the dead and its meaning is ‘day of wrath’. Ingeniously, this theme somehow relates to Paganini’s theme as can be seen in looking at the first note of the following figure:²²

Figure 4: Niccolò Paganini Caprice No. 24 in A Minor, Theme, Measures 5 – 10.



When the orchestra plays Paganini’s theme and the solo piano plays the *Dies Irae* theme, the two parts are balanced and harmonized perfectly. “Melody is music and foundation of all music.... I do not appreciate composers who abandon melody and harmony for an orgy of noises and dissonances as an end of itself.”²³ Indubitably, the poetic and expressive melody of variation eighteen is well known and, in many people’s opinion, the most gorgeous one of the many that Rachmaninoff wrote. It is based on an inversion of Paganini’s theme, and rewritten as the upside-down version in D flat major. The following several variations increasingly build momentum infused with tension and power. The *Dies Irae* theme is heard for the last time in the Coda with the orchestra producing “a huge swirl of sound.”²⁴ The music surprisingly drops to the unexpected *piano* dynamic, and the piece is abruptly concluded by the piano playing a fragment of Paganini’s theme.

²² Culshaw, *Rachmaninov*, 97.

²³ Robert Rimm, *The Composer-Pianists: Hamelin and The Eight* (Portland: Amadeus Press, 2002), 156.

²⁴ Culshaw, *Rachmaninov*, 99.

THIRD DISSERTATION RECITAL PROGRAM

April 12, 2021. 8:00 PM
Gildenhorn Recital Hall, Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center
College Park, University of Maryland

Shuai Wang, piano

Franz Liszt (1811 – 1886)

Chapelle de Guillaume Tell

Au lac de Wallenstadt

Fritz Kreisler – Sergei Rachmaninoff (1873 – 1943)

Liebesleid

Liebesfreud

Frédéric Chopin (1810 – 1849)

The Scherzo No. 4, Op. 54, in E Major

Intermission

Frédéric Chopin (1810 – 1849)

Nocturne in E-flat Major, Op. 9, No. 2

Nocturne in C Minor, Op. 48, No. 1

Franz Liszt (1811 – 1886)

Après une lecture du Dante: Fantasia quasi Sonata

RECORDING TRACK LISTING

Dissertation Recital #3 – CD 3

Franz Liszt (1811 – 1886)

Chapelle de Guillaume Tell

[TRACK 1, CD 3]

5'40"

Au lac de Wallenstadt

[TRACK 2, CD 3]

2'58"

Fritz Kreisler – Sergei Rachmaninoff (1873 – 1943)

Liebesleid

[TRACK 3, CD 3]

4'44"

Liebesfreud

[TRACK 4, CD 3]

7'17"

Frédéric Chopin (1810 – 1849)

The Scherzo No. 4, Op. 54, in E Major

[TRACK 5, CD 3]

11'01"

Frédéric Chopin (1810 – 1849)

Nocturne in E-flat Major, Op. 9, No. 2

[TRACK 6, CD 3]

4'06"

Nocturne in C Minor, Op. 48, No. 1

[TRACK 7, CD 3]

5'31"

Franz Liszt (1811 – 1886)

Après une lecture du Dante: Fantasia quasi Sonata

[TRACK 8, CD 3]

16'26"

PROGRAM NOTES

Franz Liszt (1811 – 1886)
Chapelle de Guillaume Tell
Au lac de Wallenstadt

The Romantic era saw an array of prestigious musicians, among them the exceptionally influential Hungarian composer Franz Liszt, known as a great virtuoso pianist, conductor, and music teacher. After attending one of fellow-virtuoso Niccolò Paganini's concerts, Liszt was inspired to become a virtuoso pianist and subsequently went on multiple concert tours of Europe from 1837 to 1847. The audiences, female audiences in particular, were crazy about his concerts. Liszt's playing could bring the audience into a state of ecstasy. The great German poet Henrich Heine nicknamed this phenomenon Lisztomania.

Liszt's compositions have obvious characteristics. "He employed rapid and coloristic changes of register, used dense chords and octave passages in all ranges, frequently associated with wide leaps.... scales in thirds, sixths, octaves, and even in full chords, diatonic and chromatic."²⁵ Additionally, recitative-like passages, as well as other compositional characteristics can be found in his music. His main works for the piano include the Sonata in B Minor, two piano concerti, as well as numerous études, piano transcriptions, and character pieces.

Années de pèlerinage (Years of Pilgrimage) consists of three sets of solo piano works: *Première année: Suisse* (1828-1854), *Deuxième année: Italie* (1837-1849), and *Troisième année* (1867-1877). The first volume has nine individual pieces,

²⁵ Kirby, *Music for Piano*, 209.

which are associated with nature, landscape scenery, and personal experiences. The seven pieces in the second volume are inspired by well-known works of art and literature. The last volume reflects Liszt's late style, which focuses more on harmonic experimentation rather than virtuoso elements. The pieces of the first volume are based on Liszt's own previous pieces from the first set of *Impressions et Poesies* of *Album d'un voyageur*. Liszt often referenced well-known masterworks of literature and art in his compositions; the title *Années de pèlerinage* is most likely derived from English poet Lord Byron's *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*.

Chapelle de Guillaume Tell (*Chapel of William Tell*) evokes the Swiss struggle for liberation in the 14th century. The score is prefaced by a quote from Friedrich Schiller "*Einer für alle, alle für einen*" (One for all, all for one), which is also known as the traditional motto of Switzerland. The music suggests images of a horn sounding to awaken the troops and echoes throughout the valley; it captures the spirit of "[a] revolt reverberate[ing] through the mountainside until 'freedom' is achieved."²⁶

Au lac de Wallenstadt (*At Lake Wallenstadt*) is the following piece in the same volume, capturing the scene of a tranquil, peaceful, and bucolic lake. Located in Switzerland, "Lake Wallenstadt is surrounded by snow-peaked mountains and framed by what often appear, to visitors, to be perennially blue skies and crystalline air."²⁷ Liszt chose to caption this work with one of Lord Byron's poems from *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*.

Thy contrasted lake

²⁶ Alfred Brendel, *Alfred Brendel on Music: Collected Essays* (Chicago: A Cappella Books, 2001), 256.

²⁷ John Bell Young, *Liszt: A listener's Guide* (New York: Amadeus Press, 2009), 32.

With the wild world I dwell in is a thing
Which warns me, with its stillness, to forsake
Earth's troubled waters for a purer spring.

The piece is written in the warm key of A-flat major. The rippling waves in the bass clef with a pure and dulcet melody floating above it create a serene and intoxicating atmosphere.

Fritz Kreisler – Sergei Rachmaninoff (1873 – 1943)
Liebesleid
Liebesfreud

Rachmaninoff, the great composer, pianist, and conductor, composed a large number of works that can be divided into three categories: symphonic, vocal, and piano works. In the category of piano works, transcriptions occupy a very important position, and his interest in transcribing other composers' works was not limited to certain styles or periods.

Of his many piano transcriptions, *Liebesleid* (*Love's Sorrow*) and *Liebesfreud* (*Love's Joy*) are frequently played in recitals and concerts. The two pieces were originally composed by Austrian-American violinist and composer Fritz Kreisler as part of *Alt-Wiener Tanzweisen* (*Old Viennese Melodies*), a set of three pieces for violin and piano. Both pieces are in triple meter, which is commonly associated with old Viennese dances. Compared to the original works, Rachmaninoff increases the complexity of these two compositions by infusing his own style into them, adding advanced chromaticism as well as complex and progressive harmonies. A common compositional approach that Rachmaninoff liked to use in many of his works,

including these two transcriptions, is to utilize almost the entire range of the keyboard with ascending and descending passages to conclude the work.

Frédéric Chopin (1810 – 1849)
Scherzo No. 4 in E Major, Op. 54

In 1842, Chopin's health began worsening; he lamented that "I have to lie in bed all day long, my mouth and tonsils are aching so much."²⁸ His musical output was drastically affected. Only six works were written in 1842, another six in 1843, and just one sonata in the following year.

Composed in 1842, Scherzo No.4 is the only one of the four scherzi written in a major key. Although Chopin was suffering from illness, his fourth Scherzo shows "a happier, lighter-hearted, more contented frame of mind than eight years before"²⁹ when the first Scherzo was published. The Scherzo opens with two alternating contrasting textures, one featuring gently flowing chords, and the other a rapidly rising and falling passage. After this, the right hand continues with some rapid and beautiful passages which require "great delicacy in finger technique."³⁰ The slower and lyrical midsection in C-sharp minor "takes the form of a cantabile melody accompanied sparsely by broken-chord patterns,"³¹ and expresses a touch of sorrow and the feeling of thoughtful memories. The coda is based on the four-note motive of the beginning. Finally, the piece ends triumphantly with octaves in both hands, rapid runs, and two radiant chords.

²⁸ Adam Zamoyski, *Chopin: Prince of the Romantics* (London: HarperPress, 2011), 212.

²⁹ G. C. Ashton Jonson, *A Handbook of Chopin's Works* (London: William Reeves, 1966), 243.

³⁰ Hinson and Roberts, *Pianist's Repertoire*, 253.

³¹ Kirby, *Music for Piano*, 182.

Frédéric Chopin (1810 – 1849)
Nocturne in E-flat major, Op. 9, No. 2
Nocturne in C minor, Op. 48, No. 1

In the 18th century, the term “nocturne” referred to “a serenade for a small ensemble, often of wind instruments, to be played out-of-doors and normally comprising three to five or more movements.”³² In the 19th century, the nocturne became known as a single-movement character piece with Irish composer John Field being the first to apply “nocturne” to character pieces. The style of his nocturnes had simple and cantabile melody lines, broken chord figurations in the accompaniment, and the slow-moving tempi. Later, Chopin adopted and expanded this concept to a “greater artistic moment.”³³ Based on Field’s style, Chopin tended to decorate the melodic line by adding “grace-notes, coloratura runs, and elaborate ornamental figures.”³⁴ In addition, the middle section of the ternary form structure also became more dramatic.

Over the course of his prolific life, Chopin composed 21 Nocturnes, most of which are in ternary form. Composed between 1831 and 1832, Op. 9, No. 2 in E-flat Major is often considered his most beautiful and best-known piece. The work was written in rounded binary form with a glamorous and cadenza-like coda. It was one of the shortest among all of his Nocturnes. The opening four bars introduces the theme, which later returns three more times with different ornamentation. Though simple enough, the accompaniment is difficult to control. It’s known that Chopin’s pupils

³² Kirby, *Music for Piano*, 185

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

would spend three weeks learning and practicing the left hand of a work in order to play it in the manner expected of them. The work has symmetrical phrasing, and is built on 4-bar phrases until the coda.

Composed in 1841, the two nocturnes of Op. 48 “belong to the period of Chopin’s most mature genius.”³⁵ Op. 48, No. 1 is written in ternary form. Like his other nocturnes, the work opens with a meditative setting. The unique midsection, marked *poco più lento*, starts with the chorale and the arpeggiated accompaniment figure. Then, the Lisztian virtuoso octaves gradually bring the work to its climax. The last section, marked *doppio movimento*, continues the turbulence with a return of the opening melody and a much richer and orchestral accompaniment. The ending is “one of Chopin’s happiest inspirations, and comes like a breath of ineffable peace after the stormy agitation of the repetition of the chief theme.”³⁶ Undoubtedly, this work is the grandest and most dramatic of all Chopin’s nocturnes.

Franz Liszt (1811 – 1886)

Après une lecture du Dante: Fantasia quasi Sonata

Après une lecture du Dante: Fantasia quasi Sonata is the last piece in the second volume of *Années de pèlerinage*. The work is inspired by the poem *The Divine Comedy* by Dante Alighieri, and its present title is adopted from a poem by Victor Hugo. The first draft of the work was written in 1837 with the title *Fragment after Dante*. It was in 1849 that the final version with which we are familiar today was revised and completed.

³⁵ Jonson, *Handbook of Chopin*, 229.

³⁶ Jonson, *Handbook of Chopin*, 230.

This work is constructed from two distinct and contrasting subjects, one in D minor, and the other in F-sharp major, depicting Hell and Heaven respectively. The key of D minor is often related to death, tragedy, and melancholy, as can be heard in Liszt's *Totentanz*, and Mozart's *Don Giovanni*. The first subject has transformations of two motives - tritones (known as the Devil's interval) and chromatic octaves. The work opens with descending tritones to announce the entry to Hell. Then, with dramatic and chromatic octaves, the music plunges the audience into the abyss and purgatory. The heavenly second subject is in F-sharp major, which is "often used to convey heroic fortitude or spiritual greatness,"³⁷ as seen in Liszt's other compositions *Bénédiction de Dieu dans la solitude* and *Les jeux d'eaux à la Villa d'Este*. This sincere and contrasting subject reflects the happiness of those in Heaven. Because of the single continuous movement structure, the references to non-musical sources and the use of thematic transformation, this work is "certainly reminiscent of orchestral tone poems,"³⁸ really a symphonic poem for piano.

Conclusion

This dissertation project gave me a chance to explore Romanticism in piano music more deeply. Learning more about these great composers and their wonderful and iconic works has only increased my appetite to study and perform many more works from this particular period of music history. I immensely enjoyed working on this challenging project and performing this outstanding repertoire in my three

³⁷ Young, *Liszt*, 63.

³⁸ Gordon, *Keyboard Literature*, 313.

dissertation recitals and I know that in the future, I will continue to be drawn to repertoire which features the particular qualities found in these works. The more research I have done, the better I can understand why these pieces are still so greatly loved even after centuries since they have the ability to communicate intense emotions so directly to the listener through the performer. In both my performing and teaching, I hope to share what I have learned through the study of this music, particularly in relation to freedom of expression and inspired communication. The beauty and the meaning behind these marvelous iconic works deserve to be championed or even introduced to broader audiences of all types in the future.

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